

PRESS RELEASE

IRAQ TEAM OF DEFENCE FOR TAREQ AZIZ INVOLVEMENT AND DIFFICULTIES

Released by Father Jean-Marie Benjamin

Following the request from Tareq Aziz (letter of 23 July 2004 to his family in Amman), father Jean-Marie Benjamin, for moral reasons and for justice, has accepted to coordinate the team of lawyers for the defence of the former Iraqi vice prime minister Tareq Aziz.

Since the beginning of his detention the lawyer of Tareq Aziz in Baghdad, **Mr. Badie Arief Izzat**, was only once authorized to go and meet his client in almost two years. According to Mr. Izzat's information to father Benjamin, he will be authorized to meet Mr. Aziz in the next few days.

For their part, the Italian lawyers **Remo di Martino (Ortona)**, **Marcantonio Bezicheri (Bologna)** and **Ugo Bertaglia (Modena)** have activated various procedures at:

- **The High Commission for Human Rights in Geneva**
- **The Italian Prime Minister.**
- **The European Court of Justice.**

The lawyer Marcantonio Bezicheri and father Benjamin, in the name of the defence team have solicited the intervention of the High Commission for Human Rights not only for Tareq Aziz but for the condition of imprisonment of other prisoners in Iraq. The High Commission for Human Rights in their reply of 6 January 2005 and 2 February 2005 informed us that they have activated a special procedure and created a special Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The Working Group has asked formal information at the Government of the United States and the Government of Iraq about the legal and juridical situation of Tareq Aziz. The Commission for Human Rights is waiting for the reply.

Following the letter sent on 8 November 2004 by the lawyer Remo di Martino to the **Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi**, a reply was received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 1 February 2005. The letter that was sent in the name of the **Minister of Foreign Affairs Gianfranco Fini**, signed by **Mr. Riccardo Sessa** confirms the following: "*The delicate questions you raised concern the problem of application in a specific case according to international rules included in the International Convention on civil and political rights of which Iraq and the United States are part and therefore are obliged to respect*". After having confirmed that "*every prisoner has the right to meet his Iraqi legal advisor*", (up to now only once and never a foreign lawyer), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concludes "*(...) it remains advisable to*

look out in order that the guarantees for the condition of custody and trial continue to be observed with respect to the principles of international law". The involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to "sensitize our Embassy in Baghdad in order to remind again –even with caution- the Iraqi authorities as it is in their proper interest to respect in this case as well as in other cases, the principles of justice, equity and legality".

The **Minister Rocco Buttiglione** in his letter of 23 December 2004 to the lawyer Remo di Martino after having mentioned the initiatives he personally took "*during the period 1999/2001 to find a solution to the problem of the United Nations Inspections*" (searching for arms of mass destruction) confirms that "*I had the opportunity to appreciate the humanity and the sincere interest of Tareq Aziz for a pacific solution of the conflict, such as reassuring the Western powers and to end the suffering of the Iraqi population. Tareq Aziz exposed himself personally, running personal risks (I was told) with an interview for a Western newspaper*". In his letter after having explained about other evidences, Minister Buttiglione concludes: "*(...) From discussions I have had with Tareq Aziz I noticed his conviction and sincere wish for peace and that he would do anything possible in the most difficult situation in which he was to avoid the war (...). I don't have evidence from contacts I have then had with Iraq that there were voices of his illicit enrichment or his direct responsibility in sanguinary repressions of which his regime was responsible. (...) I think he is a man who sincerely wanted to serve his country but found himself in circumstances that rendered his efforts in vain*".

Minister Buttiglione, in a meeting with Remo di Martino said that he would be willing to go to Baghdad to testify for the defence of Tareq Aziz. Concerning the European Court of Justice, the procedure is following its due course.

Assisi, !° March 2005